

Abstract

- The Electronic Health Record is a comprehensive, longitudinal and cross-institutional, semantically interoperable person-centred medical record in digital format.
- Semantic interoperability is the requirement that data stored in computer systems be meaningful, and that they retain that meaning when exchanged with and used by other computer systems.
- Electronic Health Records are widely regarded as contributing to the safety and effectiveness of healthcare, and to the efficiency and economy of healthcare delivery.
- Projects are on-going in many countries to develop Electronic Health Records, but not yet in Ireland.
- There is a confluence of developments in the Irish healthcare system that, with vision and purpose, might be harnessed to develop an Electronic Health Record. Among these are:
 - the proposal by the present Government to introduce managed competition model of Universal Health Insurance;
 - a health insurance companies initiative to develop a common e-claiming system;
 - the progress being made by the National HealthLinks Project in providing an electronic messaging system between the primary and secondary care sectors;
 - on-going work by the Health Information and Quality Authority in laying the groundwork for health identifiers for individuals, professionals and institutions, for a national demographic database, and for standards for the exchange of healthcare data.
- Those countries that report the greatest success in developing Electronic Health Records have adopted incremental, pragmatic and adaptable approaches.
- Strong, autonomous governance and leadership is required.

- The engagement of stakeholders, including both consumers and providers, is necessary throughout the development process.
- There is a growing consensus that healthcare consumers should have control of the Electronic Health Record, and the right to say when, where, and by whom, the record, or any part of it may be viewed.